



The Relationship Between the Media and the Military

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The Relationship between the Media and the Military:
Does Media Access to International Conflicts Affect Public Opinion and Foreign Policy?

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Abstract

This thesis research seeks to analyze the significance of the relationship between the media and the United States military during periods of international warfare. This thesis aims to explore the relationship between press access and consumption; and then further explore the relationship between the public perceptions as seen in the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War. Did the United States government's policies toward media access in the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War influence media coverage, and therefore public perception of those conflicts? Did the public perception from the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War influence foreign policy change in the United States?

By comparing the media practices by journalists as determined by the United States government during the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War, I illustrated the relationship between the media and U.S. government and their multi-faceted influence on public opinion in recent history. The analysis concludes that while the media coverage during the Vietnam War significantly contributed to American public opinion, media coverage was not the sole factor of significant foreign policy change in subsequent cases of U.S. involvement in international conflicts. However, it was the effect of public opinion during and after the Vietnam War that influenced the Bush administration to change their media access policies during the First Gulf War. In suppressing and managing the media coverage, the government was able to successfully portray a military achievement in the Middle East.

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Chapter I

Research Problem

From the Civil War to present day international conflicts, media has played a large part in bringing information to the public and influencing their perceptions of wars that the United States plays a part in. Career academics of government and public affairs William Dorman and Steven Livingston wrote: “In American society the news media have a constitutionally guaranteed right and, therefore, we would argue, responsibility to provide information that goes beyond government publicity campaigns.”¹ The effect of this, however, is that media coverage then has an influence on public perception and opinion. An oft touted perception by journalists and those in the media industry alike is that the effects of media coverage indirectly influence foreign policy by governments through the public impressions of the conflicts as they are informed by the media, thus paving the way for substantial policy changes based on the power of public opinion. “The mass media are the key intermediaries between citizens and their leaders, particularly with respect to policies and events being implemented far from American shores. Citizens learn virtually everything they know about foreign policy from the mass media, whether through direct personal exposure or indirectly, via conversations with friends or family members who gained *their* information from the media.”² Such public

¹ William Dorman and Steven Livingston. “News and Historical Content: The Establishing Phase of the Persian Gulf Policy Debate.” Bennett and Paletz, eds. *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 63.

² Matthew Baum and Tim Groeling. *War Stories: The Causes and Consequences of Public Views on War*. (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

opinions, when overwhelmingly popular, can create political pressure and historically have influenced American leaders' decisions involving U.S. military engagement in international conflicts.³ Documentary photographer and author David Perlmutter writes:

The allegation that news images have an especially resonant ability to drive, alter, or overturn foreign policy has received currency and generated controversy since the Vietnam War. Among those who espouse such a belief are presidents, members of the foreign policy establishment, and reputable and influential reporters and pundits...Claims of powerful effects of pictures in the press, however, are so persistent and made by such influential and powerful voices in media and the political structure, that they cannot be dismissed merely as hyperbole.⁴

Therefore, the questions this thesis paper hopes to delve into through the case studies of the Vietnam War and the first Gulf War are:

- Did the United States government's policies toward media access in the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War influence media coverage, and therefore public perception of those conflicts?
- Did the public perception from the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War influence foreign policy change in the United States?

In answering these qualitative research questions, I hypothesize that the narrative of media's influence having a significant influence on public policy and, therefore, the course of international conflicts, is an oversimplified explanation of the interaction between media, the military, and international politics. I argue that the media first

³ Richard Sobel. *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 97.

⁴ David Perlmutter. *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy: Icons of Outrage in International Crises*. (London: Praeger, 1999), 1.

influences public opinion, which then has the potential to affect government policies through public pressure placed on American leaders. My research will consist of historical analysis of media access during the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War from numerous academic and media industry resources. This thesis hopes to delineate how media coverage and the U.S. government work both together and against each other when it comes to their foreign policy goals. My research questions seek to ascertain how media access to military activity affected the public perception of international conflicts the United States was involved in; and thereafter, if such perception led the United States government toward any policy changes.

I found that the public resistance to U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, which peaked toward the end of the Vietnam War, set forth a precedent for ensuing U.S. military engagements regarding both the media and the extent of American policy and involvement in international wars. For subsequent international conflicts, the U.S. government recognized the impact of media coverage and visual images of war and sought to harness the scope of its influence through press pools, prior restraint restrictions, and utilizing press briefings to disperse the information they wanted the public to see. In the “biggest commitment of U.S. military power since Vietnam” of the First Gulf War of 1990-1991, the Bush administration was acutely aware of the negative impression on the American public from the Vietnam War.⁵ “Public opinion had a great influence on the way the administration presented the crisis in 1990-91, the diplomatic strategy the administration used leading up to the invasion, and the way the resulting

⁵ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, 141.

coalition [of nations] ultimately fought the war itself.”⁶ As the first instance of U.S. military intervention since the Vietnam War, the First Gulf War is a prime example of these new media restrictions and policy changes to assuage American public concerns of U.S. military engagement in another foreign conflict. With a tightly controlled release of information, media coverage, and photography by the military, public perception of the First Gulf War by the end of the conflict was a swift success—antithetical to the public perception at the end of the Vietnam War.⁷

Claims of the media’s ability to influence foreign policy gave rise to several popular theories about mainstream media and government interaction. One concept became known as the ‘Vietnam Syndrome,’ which suggested that the widespread American opposition to the Vietnam War influenced in part by the media presentation of the conflict resulted in isolationist sentiments that restricted the ability of American leaders to engage the U.S. troops in future military operations overseas.⁸ Following the U.S. exit from Vietnam in 1973, polls revealed that while a majority of Americans still supported the use of the U.S. military if necessary to defend national security of the United States, however, they were largely skeptical regarding U.S. military operations in the developing world.⁹ However, such theories are a simple explanation of how public perception and opinion coincide with government policies and actions. There is a historic

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Daniel Hallin and Todd Gitlin. “The Gulf War as Popular Culture and Television Drama.” Bennett and Paletz, eds. *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 162.

⁸ Spencer Tucker. *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History, 2nd Edition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1291.

⁹ Ibid.

tension between the military and the media, “a natural outgrowth of what has evolved into a checks-and-balances system within the democratic state compelling the two actors to interact as antagonists... A role of the American government is to keep the citizens of the United States informed about its official decisions and actions, except as limited by national security constraints. It is in the interpretation of these constraints and implementation of resulting policy that conflict develops.”¹⁰ Naturally, this tension is magnified during times of war. Yet, the media industry and the United States government need each other in order to achieve their individual goals during these times of war—the media requires access in order to inform their public audience about government acts and decisions that affect the citizenry, and the government needs the media to help build public support for their international efforts that include sending the nation’s citizens into conflict.

Stemming from its experience during the Vietnam War, the United States realized the importance of controlling the flow of information from the battlefields to people’s homes—thereby controlling the narrative. The relative media leniency seen in Vietnam allowed citizens at home to see and read the harsh realities of warfare in addition to the Vietnam War images that seemed to present a contrary message to the positive military outlook the United States government hoped to spread domestically to the American public. “At the heart of the Vietnam syndrome was the concern that media coverage had the potential to undermine public support for an operation and erode troop morale on the ground. As such, perceived American credibility in the world was undermined.”¹¹ In

¹⁰ Judith Baroody. *Media Access and the Military: The Case of the Gulf War*. (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1998), 3.

¹¹ Steven Livingston. “Clarifying the CNN Effect.” *The Joan Shorenstein Center* (1997): 4.

subsequent cases of international intervention, including the First Gulf War, the United States government tried to control their media image as much as possible, oftentimes leading to disinformation being fed to the public or a largely dissatisfied media contingent covering that conflict.

During the First Gulf War, “fear of an unsanitized presentation of the carnage of battle was perhaps central to the military’s efforts to control the media through the use of press pools and military escorts...for many the impression remained that at the heart of the military’s concern was the capacity of media to undermine public and political support for an operation involving casualties.”¹² In order to maintain public support for the operations in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq, the government enacted press pools, briefings, and military escorts for the media covering Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield, effectively restricting the independent access to the field and troops that journalists had experienced during the Vietnam War. The result of these actions was military censorship and approval before information or photographs were released to the public, generating a highly sanitized and inaccurate account of the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait.¹³ Furthermore, the Bush administration knew that public support and opinion would only last as long as the ground war was swift with minimal American fatalities. President Bush “repeatedly asserted that the war with Iraq would not be another Vietnam: a costly, prolonged war with unclear aims and heavy casualties.”¹⁴ During the First Gulf War, “the whole subject of casualties was one in which public opinion showed

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Miles Hudson and John Stanier. *War and the Media: A Random Searchlight*. (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1998), 223.

¹⁴ Sobel. *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*. 147.

itself most fickle. From the beginning, the American administration was convinced, no doubt rightly, that, while the country might support a quick and successful operation, it would soon lose heart in the event of a long drawn out struggle involving heavy bloodshed.”¹⁵

Furthermore, the media access and coverage managed by the government and journalists historically has been used in numerous ways to sway both the public’s opinion and their intake of information, particularly after the Vietnam War. Governments are “held accountable to the public in part through the press. In democracies, those who govern are expected [by the people who voted for them] to respond to the will of the society. This will is shaped by opinion based on information conveyed through the media. By blocking information, governments can block the feedback from the will of the people to those who govern.”¹⁶ The relationship between the U.S. government and the press was largely independent during the Vietnam War and largely stringent during the First Gulf War. The interaction between the media and public during the Vietnam War became the impetus for the symbiotic relationship between the media and the military in the United States’ involvement in the First Gulf War—for better and for worse. Those who “create and interpret icons also live within the system they manage. Journalists, commentators, academics and other students of visual culture, and politicians do not grow up outside of the convention of photojournalism... The imposition of the status of

¹⁵ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 226.

¹⁶ Baroody. *Media Access and the Military*, 11.

icon on a news photograph is rarely the result of conspiracy because photojournalism permeates modern life, we all share the same standards to some extent.”¹⁷

The accepted narrative has an additional blind spot in explaining the accuracy of the media coverage during the conflicts—especially in the era of the 24/7 news cycle. With both limited resources and an American civilian audience the media must appeal to, media coverage of international conflicts has been accused of focusing on narrow but popular stories and images, thus giving their audience an inadequate picture of the realities of these parts of the world. “News photographs are remarkably selective windows on the world...That certain realities are chosen for presentation and certain of these are taken as metonyms of the news that day or of a particular set of events is the most powerful way that an icon acts to limit our knowledge about the world. This circumscription occurs concurrently with a limiting of explanations for the icon and interpretations of its greater and lesser meanings. The icon and the discourse about it thus constitute a frame of understanding.”¹⁸ With a vested interest in both the national security of the United States and the safety of American troops, the mood of the American public depended on a positive outlook that the U.S. involvement was going well and vice versa. If popular opinion swayed in one strong direction or the other, the media was hesitant to challenge the status quo in fear of losing their audience and recrimination from the government, as was seen in the second case study to be explored later. In the First Gulf War, “as long as the information supported government drew audiences that could be sold to advertisers, both parties benefitted, ... [yet] both sides seem to take the benefits of

¹⁷ Perlmutter. *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy*, 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 126.

the relationship for granted but rail against the burdens and position themselves to increase their share of benefits at the other's expense in future conflicts.”¹⁹

The effects of the public opinion of American citizens during the Vietnam War, which was abundantly impacted by the media coverage, created ripple effects in the government's attitude toward journalists reporting on and documenting the military during international intervention efforts. While the media itself did not solely provoke the withdrawal of troops from Southeast Asia, the resulting public opinion of the 1970s applied immense pressure to President Nixon to end American involvement in the region and gave the impression of U.S. military failure. The conflicts endured by the country left a lasting impression on American citizens who became reluctant to support U.S. military intervention in following international conflicts, wary of committing their sons and neighbors to another dangerous effort without an achievable goal. The remnants of the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ followed the U.S. government to their next military intervention in the First Gulf War, leading the military to change their policies regarding access to reporters and photojournalists covering the war and how they implemented their foreign policy goals. The results were heavy restrictions on all information released by the media regarding the American military effort in the Middle East, and public assurance that the Bush administration would not ‘repeat Vietnam’ this time by utilizing their overwhelming military prowess and targeting a specific goal—liberating Kuwait from Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army.²⁰ In a rousing success, the U.S. government's adjustments from the Vietnam era worked—the ground campaign in Kuwait last only 100 hours and

¹⁹ Patrick O’Heffernan. “A Mutual Exploitation Model of Media Influence in U.S. Foreign Policy.” Bennett and Paletz, eds. *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 234.

²⁰ Sobel. *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, 59-60.

the U.S. military achieved their aim of liberating the capital city from Iraq's control. Therefore, the influence media coverage from the Vietnam War indirectly led to the modifications in media policy and operation of military power by the government in the First Gulf War via pressure caused by public opinion.

Chapter II

Background to the Problem

Media coverage and war photography have been a large part of the attention surrounding national and international conflicts from as early as the American Civil War to the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to the current Syrian refugee crisis spreading across Europe. And through those years the role that journalism, media, and conflict photography has played—or been allowed to play—has had a constantly alternating dynamic with the U.S. government partaking in international conflicts. While the first half of the 20th century largely saw a controlled release of information as propaganda to the general populace in World War II in order to portray a certain image, the Vietnam War in the 1960s to the 1970s proved to be a watershed moment in journalism and U.S. foreign policy history as journalists reporting from the conflict in Vietnam had little to no censorship or restrictions from the government. With its unprecedented access and inundation of harsh images provided to the United States populace, the Vietnam War is popularly believed to be the turning point in “between the relatively open access by the press during all previous U.S. wars and the tightly controlled access imposed during the Persian Gulf War.”²¹ Americans began to see the harsh truths of the violence of war and were “deeply affected by the reality of pain, fear, and anguish.”²²

²¹ William V. Kennedy. *The Military and the Media: Why the Press Cannot be Trusted to Cover a War*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 15.

²² Hudson and Stanier. *War and the Media*, 104-105.

The Vietnam War was seen as the first ‘living room war’—so deemed for its unparalleled look into combat life for the American public. “Vietnam became a news spectacle without precedent. Although the news reports lacked the instantaneity of today... the prospect of conflict becoming a ‘continuous floating variety show’ was relatively unexpected and produced a number of influences which politicians were somewhat unprepared for.”²³ Yet, this simple explanation fails to cover the complexity of both how audiences perceive media and how public opinion regarding international affairs is formed. It remains to be seen just how much influence all of this access really had on government foreign policy decisions. The emotions leading to the noted anti-war movement in the 1970s are evident. However, whether this reaction was a result of the media coverage or the media coverage mirrored the public sentiment will be explored further in this thesis. Despite this, the government had an undoubtedly negative experience with the media during the Vietnam War—the low-point being Walter Cronkite’s on-air conclusion of the war as a stalemate, and not a victory for the Americans—and this experience influenced governments in their subsequent international conflicts.

In the Gulf War of the early 1990s, the U.S. government attempted to rectify what went wrong between the media and military interaction during the Vietnam War. Viewers of the build up to an eventual war against Iraq “witnessed the first large-scale application of the Pentagon’s post-Vietnam resolve never again to lose a public-relations war... Many policy officials in the Defense Department and the State Department became convinced that the U.S. military defeat and eventual withdrawal from Vietnam resulted,

²³ Spencer Graham. *The Media and Peace: From Vietnam to the “War on Terror”* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 57.

in part, from critical media coverage of battlefield activities and, at home, sympathetic coverage of domestic opposition to government policies.”²⁴ In the U.S.-led United Nations coalition against Iraq in response to Iraq’s annexation of Kuwait in 1990-1991, the Pentagon placed strategic restrictions on the information revealed to the public by only allowing select journalists to visit the frontlines and gather the same information from military press briefings in press pools. This was the first conflict in which a journalist had to be escorted by military officials, the Department of Defense National Media Pool, in addition to having all of their material be approved before being published. The official explanations of these rules, as set forth in the Annex Foxtrot written by the chief aide for public affairs, Captain Ron Wildermuth, were for national security and classifying information from the enemy.²⁵

Many journalists complained about this predicament, citing that this military oversight only allowed them to see and communicate a one-sided account of the war. News bureau chiefs from both print and television collaborated to send President Bush a letter communicating these concerns.²⁶ In addition to the widespread media censorship, the government largely disseminated positive stories of the American military prowess and created parallels between Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler through the media in print and television. Analysis of the visual images in a sample showed that images of technology dominated the visual representation of the conflict, taking up to 17 percent of

²⁴ Kennedy. *The Military and the Media*, 17.

²⁵ Lori Robertson. “Images of War.” *American Journalism Review*. October/November 2004 Issue.

²⁶ Kennedy. *The Military and the Media*, 11.

total television time, larger than any other major category.²⁷ In this technology savvy war, the conflict “looked quite different from an ordinary news event. In part, this was because of the unusual sense of power conveyed by the images—the armor surging forward, the F-15E thrusting into the air with afterburners glowing, the sixteen-inch guns of the battleship *Wisconsin* belching fire.”²⁸ The combination of government information censorship and positive military propaganda contributed to an American public supporting the war effort in Kuwait. “During the months leading up to the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991 and throughout the war itself, the U.S. government succeeded, for the first time in U.S. history, in controlling almost totally what the public would be permitted to know about the conduct of military operations.”²⁹

Since then the world of media coverage and photojournalism has inherently changed. Despite a modicum of progress in the relationship between the media and the United States military with the embed program for journalists in the subsequent Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the journalism industry has taken on a guerilla-esque approach with freelance, amateur photographers and journalists. Gone are the days of the media’s monopoly of newspaper-supported photographers and journalists based in areas of conflict. In its place is a 24/7 hour news cycle, the immediacy of internet journalism and blogs, and professional photographers being overrun by ‘citizen journalists’ with camera phones. In this era of journalism and photography, the press is facing more censorship, less support, more danger from being explicitly targeted by combatants in war zones, and

²⁷ Hallin and Gitlin. *Taken by Storm*, 154-155.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kennedy. *The Military and the Media*, i.

a growing amount of competition from both the internet and amateur photographers taking advantage of the advent of social media to share information and pictures at a much lower cost than a paid professional. Furthermore, the trends of viral videos and photographs resulting in large, momentary spasms of outrage prevent anyone from gaining a nuanced understanding of international conflicts. Sending reporters and photojournalists overseas is an expensive endeavor newspapers can no longer afford. One of the largest factors in this media downslide is the decreasing profitability of newspapers and increasing competition from low-cost sources in today's industry.

Chapter III

Research Methodology

My method of research involves evaluating the historical impact of the media coverage of the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War from perspectives of journalists and photojournalists covering those conflicts and published academic studies on the matter. By taking a look at numerous sources of analyses of the impact of these international conflicts—including examinations of their media portrayals, narratives from photojournalists covering said conflicts, and the restrictions put in place regarding journalists' activities while covering wars—I aim to create an account of how media coverage, photojournalism, and military media access policies has changed over the course of the last few decades in international warfare and what its implications are in terms of influencing public opinion. I hope to delineate how the United States government's lenient policies regarding media access in the Vietnam War resulted in the stringent media access and finite U.S. military engagement actions during the First Gulf War. I hypothesize that the government recognized efforts to influence the media are important because media commentary from reporters or commentators has “dramatic impact on public opinion,” and contributed to the nuance of the relationship between media and newspapers as a business model and the influence of government control over information.³⁰ As a result, the antithetical government-media access policies as seen in the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War created two vastly differing public perceptions

³⁰ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, 20.

of U.S. military engagement in international warfare—one a longstanding, nightmarish failure and the other an abrupt success.

Chapter IV

Research Limitations

As my analysis is mainly qualitative in terms of answering my research question, there will be little quantitative research employed in this thesis paper at this point.

Another limitation to my qualitative research is my current inability to interview photojournalists one-on-one about their experiences working in combat zones as well as within the new media restrictions we have seen place in the last ten or so years. So far, I am relying on published works and interviews by photojournalists about their work and their experiences. With further progress on this thesis, I hope to be able to rectify this limitation.

Chapter V

Cases Studies

The legend of media influence during the Vietnam War in the 1960s through 1970s has stuck in the minds of American citizens and the U.S. government in every international conflict involving U.S. military engagement since that era. The influence of this era is evident through the military-media practices of the First Gulf War and the ever-changing restrictions on media policy in subsequent international combat.

Vietnam War

Often seen as the watershed moment in the relationship between the U.S. Department of Defense and the American media infrastructure, the Vietnam War:

...marked a turning point in the way photographers [and reporters] covered war and the way they and the public thought about their work. For the first time, combat photography was perceived as being against American war policy. Earlier pictures might have read to oppose the horrors of war, but they did not challenge its justification. In the complex political and media environments of Vietnam, the antiwar movement appropriated still photos and television footage to expose the inhumanity of the war on soldiers and, especially, Vietnamese civilians. Photojournalists brought Vietnam into the nation's living rooms as no other previous war."³¹

³¹ Claude Cookman. *American Photojournalism: Motivations and Meanings*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 132.

For the first time, Americans saw photographs of their soldiers setting village huts on fire with their Zippo lighters and of wounded or dead American GIs and Vietnamese enemies and civilians. These images of warfare shattered the previous impression of America's "greatest generation" of soldiers that served during World War II decades before, when the American public was naive to the reality of warfare and information about the war was dominated by positive media propaganda. As the war went on and American casualties increased, American public perception of U.S. involvement in Vietnam began to erode as reports and images published from the frontlines began to contrast with the notion of a forthcoming U.S. victory put forward by President Lyndon Johnson and American military leaders. Eventually, the Vietnam War "reaffirmed [the government's] old beliefs about controlling the press during war" and gave rise to the American public's opposition to a continued U.S. presence in Vietnam and objections against military engagement in similar conflicts.³² "The public's ultimate refusal to support an extension to the U.S. military action in Vietnam was a powerful reminder to policymakers and the military that public support was in the end decisive in determining the duration of military interventionist foreign policy (Weinberger, 1990)."³³ In the following international conflicts with U.S. military involvement such as Grenada, Panama, and the two Iraq wars, journalists had nothing close to the independence and freedom of movement they enjoyed in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the backlash of public opinion from longstanding combat and high casualties in Vietnam compelled U.S. government

³² Ibid., 134.

³³ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam*, 59-60.

and military leaders to pursue ‘quick and bloodless’ means in future military engagements.

The roots of the Vietnam War began with the Cold War as the United States government intervened in the region as a means to contain Communism and prevent a Communist takeover of South Vietnam. Despite American military advisors arriving in what was then French Indochina beginning in 1950, Vietnam did not receive much, if any, American media attention until U.S. military involvement and troop levels escalated in 1961 and 1962. Until then any media coverage of Southeast Asia largely covered communism and the Cold War.³⁴ In 1964, U.S. involvement in the region escalated even more after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in which the U.S.S. *Maddox* destroyer clashed with three North Vietnamese torpedo boats resulting in an exchange of gunfire, four dead North Vietnamese sailors, and damage done to the American and North Vietnamese ships. The incident led to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which allowed President Johnson to assist any Southeast Asian country whose government was considered under threat of ‘communist aggression’—in other words, a legal justification to increase U.S. military presence in Vietnam and engage in open warfare against North Vietnam.³⁵ The South Vietnamese and United States forces relied on their air superiority against the North Vietnamese and Communist forces during the conflict, in addition to their overpowering military resources that included search and destroy operations, airstrikes, and artillery. In the course of waging the war on behalf of South Vietnam’s anti-

³⁴ Daniel C. Hallin. *The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 9.

³⁵ Edwin E. Moise. *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 78.

Communist effort, the U.S. military conducted a large-scale bombing campaign against North Vietnam under the name Operation Rolling Thunder, which lasted three years and aimed to destroy North Vietnam's air defenses and boost South Vietnamese morale.³⁶ During these times, the U.S. headquarters in the region—Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV)—provided journalists with facilities and transportation, including priority seating on all U.S. aircrafts that “greatly expedited the gathering of news” in the field.³⁷

As United States involvement in Vietnam intensified in the 1960s-1970s, the international media was unprepared for the media spectacle that the Vietnam War would become and be remembered for; often leading to misrepresentation or oversimplification of the issues at hand. In the early stages of the media presence and coverage in Vietnam, American journalists arrived in Saigon with little to no knowledge of the language, culture, history, or society of Vietnam—nor did they make many efforts to learn, despite the U.S. Department of Defense offering a brief introductory course on the history and culture of the country. This is in part due to the short six to twelve month rotation most journalists spent in South Vietnam, which provided little incentive for journalists to learn the language. As a result, early media in Vietnam displayed “Cold War myopia, ethnocentrism, cultural bias, and [the] racism embedded in American ideology” regarding coverage on the Vietnamese people. Additionally, the correspondents in Vietnam were

³⁶ Bernard Nalty. *The Vietnam War*. (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1998), 97.

³⁷ Susan Moeller. *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1989), 360.

not trained by their organizations to understand military matters.³⁸ And the “lack of an *official* censorship put the burden on the correspondents and editors: the press had to judge for itself what information could be deleterious to military security,” leading to further discord between the government and the media.³⁹ The common American perception was that with the United States’ superior military, resources, and manpower, South Vietnam had a path paved toward victory against their third-world opposition.⁴⁰ Little media discussion occurred as to why it was difficult to convince the Vietnamese citizenry to join the side of the Saigon government in the South, and communist troops were often portrayed as brutal, warlike, and sinister with most depiction using hateful imagery or stereotypes of Asians that were popular at that time.⁴¹ Furthermore, the media followed the lead of the U.S. military in addressing the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) as the “Viet Cong”—largely seen as a derogatory term—and the northern soldiers of the People’s Army of Vietnam as the North Vietnamese Army, or NVA.⁴²

By 1966, the press contingent in South Vietnam had swelled to 282 from the 40 journalists that were present in 1964. In August of 1966, the number jumped even higher

³⁸ James Landers. *The Weekly War: Newsmagazines and Vietnam*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 236.

³⁹ Moeller, *Shooting War*, 366.

⁴⁰ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 103.

⁴¹ Landers, *The Weekly War*, 228.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 256.

to 419.⁴³ During this period, both the South Vietnamese government and the United States employed minimal media censorship. “The South Vietnamese government was in charge of accreditation, and anybody with letters from news organizations could get credentialed. Any westerner with credentials could travel freely on U.S. military planes and helicopters.”⁴⁴ Any other correspondents had to show letters from their editors stating that they were representatives from legitimate news-gathering organizations that would take responsibility for their conduct. Freelance journalists had to show a letter from one of their clients confirming that client would purchase their work from Vietnam.⁴⁵ Unlike in subsequent wars, there was no requirement for official military review or approval before a report could be sent back to the United States and be broadcast or published to the rest of the world.⁴⁶

The advent of new media technology mixed with the unprecedented level of access provided to correspondents in Vietnam brought previously undocumented horrors home to American citizens through video and still photography. “The 35 mm camera let photographers capture the carnage of battles and bombing campaigns. Advances in film and logistics let television crews shoot, edit, ship, and broadcast stories while they were still timely.”⁴⁷ By the late 1960s, the three big American television networks installed their second largest news bureaus, second to Washington, D.C., in Saigon due to the

⁴³ William M. Hammond. *Reporting Vietnam: Media & Military at War*. (United States of America: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 2.

⁴⁴ Cookman, *American Photojournalism*, 132-133.

⁴⁵ Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*, 2.

⁴⁶ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 106.

⁴⁷ Cookman, *American Photojournalism*, 132.

amount of film that needed to be developed and broadcast. MACV in conjunction with the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), held daily military briefings—commonly referred to as the “Five O’Clock Follies”—and invited fifty to one hundred reporters. Television reporters would then use this information to phone in a voiceover narration for film already en route by plane to the United States.⁴⁸ Additionally, MACV and JUSPAO hired a press officer, U.S. Mission Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs Barry Zorthian, to advise General William Westmoreland who commanded the U.S. troops in Vietnam on public affairs matters and to serve as a liaison between the U.S. embassy, MACV, and the press. His other duties were to publicize information that refuted erroneous or misleading news stories, and to feed Saigon correspondents stories of the war that were more favorable to the policies of the U.S. government.⁴⁹ Saigon bureau chiefs of the news outlets present were also invited to closed sessions in which presentations would be made by a briefing officer, an official from the embassy, or the CIA station chief who would present background or off-the-record information on upcoming Vietnamese political events or military operations.⁵⁰

By implementing these practices “to secure a consensus and, more important, approval at home, the American military and government resorted to secrecy, misrepresentations, and lies... In trying to keep Southeast Asia out of the communist camp, the United States came perilously close to losing its own democratic ideals.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Baroody, *Media Access and the Military*, 17.

⁴⁹ Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*, 5.

⁵⁰ Ron Stienmann. *Inside Television’s First War*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 33.

⁵¹ Moeller, *Shooting War*, 333.

Until this point, the American public largely believed the impression put forth by President Johnson, General Westmoreland, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and spokesperson Zorthian that the war in Vietnam was almost over and victory was imminent. “McNamara quoted statistics, including body counts of the enemy, Johnson gave upbeat analyses, and at a November 1967 news conference, Westmoreland forecast a U.S. victory in the coming year by saying his military command could see ‘the light at the end of the tunnel.’”⁵²

However, the public perception took a sudden turn on January 30, 1968 with the Tet Offensive—a surprise, coordinated attack by the North Vietnamese Army during the Asian lunar new year targeted key United States military and political locations in South Vietnam, including the U.S. embassy. While this was a strategic failure for the North Vietnamese who were driven back by the American forces and failed to hold any of the sites they attacked, the images and video that were released in the media were enough to taint the American public perception, undermine morale in the United States, and motivate the anti-war movement.⁵³ “The event with the greatest impact was the showing on television of some Communist sappers actually inside the American Embassy in Saigon. Television pictures and news reports of this incursion had an enormous effect in the United States... It had major symbolic value--the heart of the American war effort was actually under physical attack. The shock was colossal.”⁵⁴

⁵² Cookman, *American Photojournalism*, 133.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 112-113.

From November 1967 to February 1968, the percent of the American public that believed the United States was making progress in Vietnam dropped from 51 to 32 percent. By March of 1968, President Johnson's approval rating on the war had dropped thirteen points to 26 percent.⁵⁵ General Westmoreland requested 200,000 more troops after the Tet Offensive to increase pressure on the Viet Cong, but the request was denied.⁵⁶ One of the most searing, iconic images taken by photojournalist Eddie Adams came from the Tet Offensive, in which South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes a Viet Cong death squad captain, Nguyen Van Lem. The photo depicts the moment of death for the young Viet Cong member and went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1968 for Spot News Photography. The fallout from the photograph was instantaneous—the American people felt the government had deceived them about the American war effort and support for U.S. intervention in Vietnam plummeted:

In the words of a legion of historians and commentators of the time, Tet was the watershed, the turning point, the beginning of the end of America's war in Indochina. Most important, many of the results of Tet have been suggested as arising from the portrayal of the events in the mass media, especially the sensational, bloody, kinetic visual images--such as that of the Saigon execution--that appeared in American newspapers and magazines and on television screens...The most common dyad was the juxtaposition of the notion that Tet was a military victory for the United States and its allies, but at the same time was a psychological and political defeat.⁵⁷

As a result, the American people began to distrust the government and relied more on the media for representation of what was happening in Vietnam. At the

⁵⁵ Hallin, *The "Uncensored" War*, 169.

⁵⁶ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 112-113.

⁵⁷ Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy*, 36.

recommendation of his advisers, Johnson “considered a bombing halt and new negotiations to stem the erosion of public support. At the same time, Johnson was worried about the political consequences of scaling down the war effort if the results were detrimental to U.S. goals...This question reveals that public opinion not only figured in Johnson’s decision-making but also established the boundaries within which he could act.”⁵⁸ There is still considerable controversy about the role of media during and after the Tet Offensive. Tet, “partly because of the media distortions, had a vast effect on American opinion of all shades and as a result the decision was taken, consciously or unconsciously, to withdraw American troops from Vietnam.”⁵⁹

In conjunction with the eye-opening portrayal of Vietnam warfare in media, the rising number of American casualties increased dissatisfaction in the war. The total number of Americans killed in Vietnam surpassed the Korean War total after the Tet Offensive in March 1968, and American public support for the war decreased approximately 15 percent every time U.S. Vietnam-related deaths increased by a factor of ten.⁶⁰ For the first time, “it was the television which brought the war right into the American living room. Reading about death and destruction is one thing; actually seeing it with your own eyes is quite another.”⁶¹ Walter Cronkite provided another crushing blow to American public morale in his denunciation of the Vietnam War at the close of his broadcast on February 27, 1968 after his famous trip covering the aftermath of the Tet

⁵⁸ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 66.

⁵⁹ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 114.

⁶⁰ Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy*, 48.

⁶¹ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 104.

Offensive, in which he stated: “To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.”⁶² The decline in public support for the Vietnam War “signaled the end of a twenty-six-year era of extroversion that had lasted from 1941 to 1967. The years of 1967-68 were the turning point in public mood...not only due to the Tet Offensive and Johnson’s withdrawal from the presidential race, but also in the aftermath of widespread social conflict and civil violence that contributed to the public’s perception of a decline in U.S. prestige at home and abroad.”⁶³

Although the antiwar movement in the United States had been steadily growing among the American populace since the early 1960s due to the military draft and moral opposition to U.S. intervention, it reached its breaking point in the chain reaction of outrage after the Tet Offensive and the media portrayal of the devastation in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s. “Tet appeared in the news as a dramatic and disastrous turn of events. But its impact on public opinion and on policy is more complex and less dramatic—though certainly not insignificant—than generally supposed. Tet was... a moment when trends that had been in motion for some time reached balance and began to tip the other way.”⁶⁴ In November 1969, the American public was again infuriated when news of the war crimes and a cover up committed by the U.S. military during the My Lai

⁶² Walter Cronkite. “Final Words: Cronkite’s Vietnam Commentary.” NPR (July 18, 2009): <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106775685>.

⁶³ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 35-36.

⁶⁴ Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”*, 168.

Massacre in March 1968 became public knowledge. Known as the “most shocking episode of the Vietnam War,” the mass killing took place in two South Vietnamese hamlets in which American soldiers murdered hundreds of unarmed civilians, including women, children and infants. Some of the women were gang raped and their bodies mutilated.⁶⁵ This incident added fuel to the fire that the Tet Offensive sparked in the antiwar movement, leading to mass protests and riots across the country—notably at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

In 1969, the United States began to withdraw troops from the region under President Nixon’s “Vietnamization” policy, also known as the Nixon Doctrine, which called for the build up of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) so they could take over the defense of South Vietnam. (However, American troops would not be fully withdrawn from Vietnam until 1973, after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January of that year.) It was at this point that President Nixon changed the narrative of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He “calculated that the public would not tolerate a military defeat in Vietnam and that his own reelection prospects depended in part on ending the war on honorable terms...He came to see that the hope for winning the war—through a significant military escalation—was dependent on the public continuing support for our efforts in Vietnam to the extent that it did for as long as it did.”⁶⁶ With his plan to withdraw troops, Nixon affixed a solid end to a drawn-out war which many worried would be endless and cost more lives. The predominant issue transformed from *if* the United States was going to leave Vietnam to *how* the United States were going to leave,

⁶⁵ Susan Brownmiller. *Against our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), 103-105.

⁶⁶ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 96-97.

much to the satisfaction of those behind the antiwar movement at home. In essence, Nixon was aware of how important public support was for his policies and “implied that the erosion of support influenced his policies.”⁶⁷ President Nixon’s approval rating “averaged 57% over his first term, a very respectable showing; he won reelection against George McGovern, whose major issue was Vietnam, by a landslide. The most basic reason for this success with the mass public was no doubt the policy of Vietnamization itself. By turning over the burden of ground combat to the South Vietnamese, the administration lowered American casualties from more than 14,000 killed in 1968 to 300 in 1972.”⁶⁸

In attempts to turn attention away from Vietnam and decrease the American public’s interest and knowledge of the war, President Nixon began to limit the press’s access to information from inside Vietnam itself. The Nixon administration would “more and more try to have media without the journalists” by holding fewer press conferences as time went on and giving more uninterrupted, prime-time speeches.⁶⁹ However, as U.S. military withdrawals began in Vietnam, the media began to focus on Nixon’s Vietnamization policy, American and civilian Vietnamese casualties, and topics regarding American troops: collapse of morale, drug abuse, interracial tensions, and disciplinary problems.⁷⁰ Reporting of My Lai and other war crimes cases focused

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”*, 182.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 184.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 179-180.

“attention on civilian victims of the war, and no doubt contributed to some weakening of the moral dichotomy television had set up between Americans and the enemy.”⁷¹

Despite his initial surge in popularity, President Nixon’s relationship with the media and the American public began to deteriorate as time wore on and the U.S. military continued to be drawn into regional conflicts. According to public polls in 1970, only a third of Americans believed the United States had not made a mistake by sending troops to fight in Vietnam.⁷² A study authorized by the Trilateral Commission in 1975 examining the “governability” of the American public found that “the most notable new source of national power in 1970, as compared to 1950, was the national media,” thus providing evidence for the argument that the development of television journalism coupled with the public’s introduction to horrific warfare through the largely uncensored media access contributed to the undermining of governmental authority and actions.⁷³ The U.S. military and ARVN invaded Cambodia in 1970 to target Viet Cong and NVA bases in response to North Vietnam’s invasion of the neighboring country and in opposition to Nixon’s promise of de-escalation, sparking more protests—including the ill-fated Kent State University protest against the Cambodia Campaign when Ohio National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of unarmed college students, killing four and wounding nine.⁷⁴ In 1971, the Pentagon Papers, commissioned by the Department of

⁷¹ Ibid., 180.

⁷² William Lunch and Peter Sperlich. “American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam.” *The Western Political Quarterly* 32 (1979): 21-44.

⁷³ Daniel C. Hallin. “The Media, the War in Vietnam, and Political Support: A Critique of the Thesis of an Oppositional Media.” *The Journal of Politics* 46 (1984): 2-24.

⁷⁴ Bob Fink. *Vietnam -- A View from the Walls: A History of the Vietnam Anti-War Movement*. (Old Saybrook, CT: Greenwich Publishing, 1981), 53.

Defense, were leaked to *New York Times* detailing a top secret history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the many public deceptions on the part of the U.S. government. Furthermore, the Easter Offensive in 1972 displayed how South Vietnam could not survive against the North Vietnamese army and communist forces without the United States military and air superiority. As U.S. military troop withdrawals continued, the southern region was saved from the coordinated mass invasion by the NVA by the United States' bombing campaign, Operation Linebacker.⁷⁵ Eventually, after years of negotiations, deadlocks, and delays—including Operation Linebacker II, a U.S. bombing campaign that destroyed much of the remaining industry and economic capability of North Vietnam—the Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 27, 1973, thus effectively ending U.S. military involvement in the war.

In 1973, “public opposition had essentially forced the United States to withdraw from Vietnam. In 1975, Congress cut off funding to the South Vietnamese government. The ‘post-Vietnam syndrome’... informed opposition to U.S. interventions in the 1970s through the 1990s.”⁷⁶ Both the American public and U.S. government were greatly disillusioned—by the drawn-out battle that was once promised to be a swift and easy victory, by the indelible images of casualties and horrific warfare in the press, by the broken promises and deceptions from their government regarding the status of the Vietnam War, by the exposure of military misconduct damaging the image of the American soldier and hero, and by the influence of the press. “There is one point of general consensus. The Vietnam War had a profound and lasting effect on the whole

⁷⁵ George Herring. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 1986), 260.

⁷⁶ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 98.

gamut of American life. It punctured once and for all the concept of American omnipotence. In spite of a massive economic and conventional military advantage, the Americans were not able to defeat their enemy.”⁷⁷ While at many times an ally to the government in providing information the military wanted to bring to the public regarding U.S. involvement in international conflicts, the media’s independence from military oversight during their presence in Vietnam contributed to the deterioration of American public opinion. The challenges of media management in a conflict like Vietnam were daunting—there were no good choices. Attempting to limit and suppress the press would have been “counterproductive... and impractical.”⁷⁸ The senior military officials running the war “watched helplessly as their ability to shape the public’s perception of reality in Vietnam gradually ebbed away. Journalists displaced high officials as the arbiters of truth. In the process, the officials found their fellow status, credibility, and authority were progressively attenuated...No wonder they mistook the press for the enemy.”⁷⁹ However, media access and conflict photography alone cannot account for the entire failure of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam or any major foreign policy shifts—author Daniel Hallin concludes in *The “Uncensored” War: The Media and Vietnam*, that the media did not “lose the war,” as he “links media behavior to the state of society and the level of consensus in the political structure.”⁸⁰ Indeed, the Vietnam War “period was not one of reverting to overt isolation, but was characterized by a split in opinion regarding the

⁷⁷ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 103.

⁷⁸ Nancy Ethiel ed. *The Military, the Media, and the Administration: An Irregular Triangle*. (Chicago: McCormick Tribune Foundation, 2002), 23-24.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy*, 39.

means of implementing foreign policy... and highlighted the differences between and within the opinions of the public and the elites.”⁸¹ Bolstered by the oil and hostage crises in Iran in the 1970s, the American public opinion grew wary of direct intervention and becoming embroiled in another international disaster. Additionally, the effects of the media access in Vietnam changed the landscape for all military-media relations in all subsequent international conflicts that included U.S. involvement or intervention. “Vietnam is the watershed between the relatively open access by the press during all previous U.S. wars and the tightly controlled access imposed during the Persian Gulf War.”⁸² Understanding how that happened is crucial to understanding why the loss of the American public confidence drove the military to impose the controls that it did during the First Gulf War.

First Gulf War

The ‘Vietnam syndrome’ of the 1970s brought clear repercussions to the Bush administration’s goal to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi forces. Nearly two decades later at the onset of another U.S. military intervention, this time in the Middle East, and with the consequences of the media relations in the Vietnam War still fresh in their minds, the U.S. government was determined to not let public opinion undermine their overseas efforts. The result was to enact major adjustments to the government’s policies regarding how to achieve their goal—with an aggressive and rapid

⁸¹ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 29.

⁸² Kennedy, *The Military and the Media*, 3.

ground campaign—and to restrict media access to journalists reporting from the Middle East. This allowed the government to steer the public narrative to focus on success and power of the Coalition forces and suppress any negative optics from the Middle East. “As part of its effort to sustain support for the war against Iraq, the Bush administration offered repeated assurances that it had fully absorbed the canonical lessons of Vietnam. President George [H.W.] Bush was determined to dissuade Americans from viewing the war to liberate Kuwait through the lens of Vietnam. Instead, he wanted them to see it was a replay of World War II.”⁸³ A ten-page policy written by Captain Ron Wildermuth, the chief Public Affairs Officer for U.S. Central Command, asserted that journalists would be escorted at all times, media would be relegated to press pools, the military would select who could talk to troops and under what conditions, and prior restraint would be applied to all journalists for material deemed dangerous to national security.⁸⁴ The media and television news had also gone through significant changes in the years since the Vietnam War. By 1990, television news networks were able to report live from the battlefield in real time and the First Gulf War became known as the ‘first televised war,’ which the U.S. government was keen to use to their advantage.⁸⁵ The case of the United States’ involvement in the First Gulf War shows the difference of the media influence during the Vietnam War. Instead of diminishing public opinion and morale, the media contributed to building public support for the First Gulf War with propaganda tactics by the Bush administration and increased reporting restrictions on field journalists

⁸³ Ethiel ed., *The Military, the Media, and the Administration*, 16.

⁸⁴ Robertson, “Images of War.” *American Journalism Review*.

⁸⁵ Douglas Kellner. *The Persian Gulf TV War*. (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1992), 1.

in the Middle East.⁸⁶ While the full effects of the Vietnam War's media portrayal in the United States on foreign policy is still under debate, its effect on the government's relationship with the American public's opinion is highly apparent. Recognizing the need to establish strong public support for military action in the Middle East, the Bush administration "tailored its strategy, both in the presentation of the crisis and in the actual plan of the war, to respond to the desires of the public. It was through this attempt at shaping public attitudes that public opinion ultimately shaped policy."⁸⁷

The openness and independence with which the American media showed the American public the horrors of warfare and pointed out the hypocrisy of their government leaders by publishing loosely censored conflict photography and independent reporting undermined morale with both citizens at home and U.S. troops thus leading to monumental pressure to end the ongoing conflict. The fallout ended political careers and left U.S. citizens highly disillusioned with future military operations with U.S. involvement—a symptom of the 'Vietnam Syndrome,' which claimed that widespread American opposition to the war resulted in isolationist attitudes and limited the ability for American leaders to engage in operations overseas.⁸⁸ This was something the U.S. government was sure to be aware of when they actively inserted themselves in the conflict between Kuwait and Iraq in 1990 on behalf of Kuwait's interests.

The government utilized and manipulated the media to their advantage in two distinct ways during the First Gulf War: 1) by severely limiting journalists' independence

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 141-142.

⁸⁸ Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, 1291-1292.

in restricting access the frontlines: releasing information to the press pool through briefings, and requiring military chaperones and pre-approval of material for the rare journalists who were able to interview troops; and 2) by using the advent of 24-hour cable news to distribute pro-military propaganda to portray the U.S. military's superiority with images of smart bombs and limit negative press and photographs. While the American media seemed more sympathetic and accommodating to the U.S. government's goals in their coverage during the First Gulf War than during the Vietnam War, the relationship between the media and the military in this case combined "elements of both collaboration and conflict" and was "one of dependence, based not on mutual affection or regard but expediency and self-interest."⁸⁹ More often than not, the relationship combined elements of genuine cooperation, exposure, and manipulation at any point.

Prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait were embroiled in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, in which Kuwait eventually aided Iraq in an attempt to avoid the revolution that Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini threatened to bring to the country.⁹⁰ During this time, Kuwait provided significant financial assistance to Iraq, thus leading to a \$14 billion debt the Iraqis were unable to pay off. By the end of the war, Kuwait refused to pardon the debt despite Iraq's argument that the Iran-Iraq war prevented the advancement of Iranian authority in Kuwait. Relations between Iraq and Kuwait began to further fray as Iraq accused Kuwait of selling its oil below the agreed-upon Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) price and of slant-drilling across the international border into Iraq's portion of Rumaila field, putting Iraq

⁸⁹ Ethiel ed., *The Military, the Media and the Administration*, 14.

⁹⁰ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 12.

billions of dollars further in debt. Financially burdened from the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein began to prepare for an invasion of Kuwait. On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein commenced an invasion of Kuwait by bombing the capital. The Iraqi military overpowered the Kuwaiti military in two days and gained control of the capital city. The royal family fled, and Kuwait's Emir was deposed. On August 8th, the country was declared a province of Iraq before Saddam Hussein named his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, as the governor of Kuwait. This began what was to be a seven-month long occupation, leading to international condemnation and immediate economic sanctions against Iraq from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).⁹¹

The United States government was faced with the need to quickly generate American public support for a military intervention in Iraq. This type of support “deterred potential critics in Congress from opposing Bush while also helping to convince foreign leaders, particularly in the Arab world, that Bush would be able to deliver on the promises of military action that he was making... Central to the framing of the Persian Gulf Crisis during the establishing phase was a selective attention to information by the news media, particularly information regarding the historical root causes of the crisis.”⁹² In this case, the Bush administration's purpose was broadly aided by the media's dearth of attention on the Iran-Iraq war and the United States' surreptitious role in the conflict while it was happening. In order to promote American support domestically and coalition support internationally, the United States employed pro-military and anti-Saddam Hussein propaganda during the initial phases of the First Gulf War—a period

⁹¹ Ibid., 16.

⁹² Dorman and Livingston. “News and Historical Content: The Establishing Phase of the Persian Gulf Policy Debate.” *Taken by Storm*, 65.

running from the Invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, to President Bush's announcement of 150,000 additional troops to be sent to the Persian Gulf area to provide an "adequate offensive military option" on November 8, 1990.⁹³ The United States claimed that Iraq would potentially invade Saudi Arabia, a country purported to control 25 percent of the world's known oil reserves and "an investment portfolio even larger than Kuwait's."⁹⁴ In the media, the Bush administration systematically disseminated deceptions to promote its war policy through misleading reports from the Pentagon that the Iraqi army had positioned offensive military troops on the Saudi Arabian border.⁹⁵ These reports were highly publicized on ABC's *Nightline* television newscast and reported widely in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, despite "compelling evidence that suggested that U.S. claims concerning the imminent Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia was pure disinformation designed to legitimate a U.S. military intervention in the Gulf."⁹⁶

In arguably the most egregious act of propaganda conducted by the Kuwaiti government, the PR firm Hill and Knowlton were hired by Citizens for a Free Kuwait, a group largely funded by the government of Kuwait, to broadcast fictitious stories about Iraqi human rights atrocities in Kuwait and develop support for UN and American intervention. In October 1990, the PR firm arranged for a teenage Kuwaiti girl to tearfully testify before the Human Rights Caucus of the U.S. Congress that she witnessed

⁹³ Ibid., 63.

⁹⁴ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 17.

⁹⁵ Scott Peterson. "In war, some facts less factual." *Christian Science Monitor*. Sept. 9, 2002. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0906/p01s02-wosc.html>

⁹⁶ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 17.

Iraqi soldiers remove several infants from incubators in a hospital and left them to die on the floor.⁹⁷ This infant-killing story helped marshal Congressional and public support for U.S. military action as it “reverberated through American society. President Bush used it as a touchstone symbol of inhuman depravity in several of his speeches on the war and on Saddam Hussein.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, the PR firm “organized a photo exhibition of Iraqi atrocities displayed at the UN and the U.S. Congress and widely shown on television; assisted Kuwaiti refugees in telling stories of torture; lobbied Congress; and prepared video and print material for the media.”⁹⁹ It was only after the war had ended in 1992, when Hill and Knowlton’s deception was exposed. The Kuwaiti teenager who testified about the Iraqi soldiers killing newborn infants was revealed to be the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States who had been coached for the hearings organized by the firm.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the PR firm doctored photo and video evidence to promote their campaign and commissioned a focus group survey, gathering evidence from groups of people to find out what angers them. Hill and Knowlton’s “efforts were focused on media training...drafting speeches and scheduling speaking tours, monitoring and analyzing legislative initiatives, distributing video and other materials, and tracking public opinion.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ann Marie Seward Barry. *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 282.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, 282.

¹⁰¹ Jarol Manheim. “Strategic Public Diplomacy: Managing Kuwait’s Image During the Gulf Conflict.” Bennett and Paletz, eds. *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 141.

The lack of criticism from the mainstream media in the initial weeks of the crisis illustrated the media's dependence on maintaining their own audience. Specifically, the broadcast media were "afraid to go against a perceived popular consensus, to alienate people, or to take unpopular stands because they [were] afraid of losing viewers and thus profits. Because U.S. military operations have characteristically been supported by the majority of the people, at least in their early stages, television is extremely reluctant to criticize potentially popular military actions."¹⁰² By the 1990s, 24-hour cable news networks transformed how American audiences consumed the news since the Vietnam War era. The First Gulf War provided ample visual material to promote the superiority of the U.S. military and their foreign policy goals. The American public positively responded to this coverage, which in turn prompted the news media to continue churning out similar coverage.¹⁰³ Further pressure from the government to suppress any negative opinions on the military efforts in the Middle East from the troops to journalists was evidenced by the military's policy of withholding approval of publishing the interviews and contributed to the positive public viewpoint. "The Gulf consumed 83 percent of all networks news time between December 1990 and March 1991...public opinion during this period was dominated by press reports of policy success."¹⁰⁴ As a result, the media "responded to the established preferences of their audience and the goals of the government...The media limited the scope of their coverage. They tended to praise the

¹⁰² Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 85.

¹⁰³ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 141.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Brody. "Crisis, War, and Public Opinion: The Media and Public Support for the President." Bennett and Paletz, eds. *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 224.

military while ignoring episodes of protest,” resulting in a biased, one-dimensional perspective of the conflict to the larger American public.¹⁰⁵ In conjunction with these reports, the Bush administration also launched a public relations campaign against Saddam Hussein through the media by shining a spotlight on his human rights abuses. “It wasn’t until the establishing phase that Saddam’s ties to international terrorism were once again a popular topic for the Bush administration and journalists. Newspaper columnists and the administration issued dire warnings that Iraq was ‘cultivating terrorist ties’... The ties had been there all along, though ignored.”¹⁰⁶

The Bush administration also strongly drew on parallels to another political villain to further demonize Saddam Hussein—Adolf Hitler. In the initial phase of the conflict, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* published 228 stories, editorials, or columns on Iraq and/or Kuwait which invoked the Saddam Hussein-Adolf Hitler comparison.¹⁰⁷ Hussein’s negative image “was forged by a combination of rhetoric, popular culture demonology, and Manichean metaphysics that presented the Gulf crisis as a struggle between good and evil.”¹⁰⁸ In creating the parallel between Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler, the Bush administration was successful in depicting the origins of the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait as “the simple villainy of a lone individual, rather than as the logical outcome of the foreign policy of the Reagan and Bush administrations,” thus excluding from the narrative “the role played by two successive administrations in

¹⁰⁵ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 155.

¹⁰⁶ Dorman and Livingston, “News and Historical Content: The Establishing Phase of the Persian Gulf Policy Debate.” *Taken by Storm*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 63.

the creation of the threat Iraq posed in the fall of 1990.”¹⁰⁹ The machination of Saddam Hussein “as an absolute villain, as a demon who is so threatening and violent that he must be destroyed and eradicated, precluded negotiations and a diplomatic solution,” thus paving the way for the Bush administration’s goal of military aggression.¹¹⁰

The reaction from the international community was swift. Hours after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait began, the United States and Kuwait had a meeting with the UNSC, which passed Resolution 660, condemning the invasion and demanding the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops.¹¹¹ On August 3rd, the Arab League responded with a resolution of their own, which called for a solution to be reached internally within the Arab League and warned against outside intervention.¹¹² The international community under the UNSC then passed Resolution 661 on August 6th, placing economic sanctions on Iraq, followed soon after by Resolution 665, which allowed for a naval blockade to enforce the economic sanctions.¹¹³ On August 7th, President Bush commenced a defense mission to counter Iraq’s ‘threat’ to invade Saudi Arabia and sent troops to the region under the codename Operation Desert Shield; however, the defense aspect of the mission was abandoned when Saddam Hussein declared Kuwait to be the nineteenth province of

¹⁰⁹ Dorman and Livingston. “News and Historical Content: The Establishing Phase of the Persian Gulf Policy Debate.” *Taken by Storm*, 73.

¹¹⁰ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 64.

¹¹¹ United Nations: Department of Political Affairs (1989). *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council: Supplement 1989–1992*. United Nations Publications. p. 570.

¹¹² Ziad Swaidan and Mihai Nica. ["The 1991 Gulf War And Jordan's Economy"](#). *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6 (2002).

¹¹³ United Nations: Department of Political Affairs. *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council: Supplement 1989–1992*. p. 570.

Iraq and named his cousin as its military-governor. The United States dispatched naval ships and air force units to the region; and over the next few months, while a series of UNSC and Arab League resolutions were passed, the military build up increased until reaching approximately 550,000 troops.¹¹⁴

On November 29th, Resolution 678 was passed by the UNSC which set a deadline on an Iraqi military withdrawal for January 15, 1991, and authorized “all necessary means to uphold and implement Resolution 660” including the use of force if Iraq failed to comply.¹¹⁵ With the Bush administration’s media campaign to alarm the international community against Saddam Hussein’s aggression and an international tour by Secretary of State James Baker to ensure support from members of the Arab League and the western world. Despite believing that the conflict was an internal Arab issue and hesitating to increase U.S. leverage in the Middle East, the countries were persuaded by Iraq’s belligerent acts towards its bordering states, offers of economic aid and debt forgiveness, and threats to withhold aid. The Bush administration was able to pull together a coalition of thirty-four countries’ forces opposing Iraq’s encroachment on its neighboring territories. U.S. Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr., a veteran of the Vietnam War, was selected to be the commander of the Coalition forces in the Persian Gulf.¹¹⁶ This set the stage for the United States to demonstrate their military and tactical superiority on an international stage under the justification of pushing back Iraqi aggression.

¹¹⁴ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 111.

¹¹⁵ United Nations: Department of Political Affairs. *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council: Supplement 1989–1992*. p. 570.

¹¹⁶ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 282.

For the U.S. government, “the principal objective was to preserve its political legitimacy (i.e. to avoid the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’) and to protect itself against the additional budget-cutting pressure that would surely follow a less-than-exemplary [military] showing.”¹¹⁷ As a result, the government was sure to promote strong images to the general public through the media as “the Gulf War was above all a story of American prowess: a story of the firmness of American leaders, the potency of American technology, and the bravery, determination, and skills of American soldiers. It was the story of a job well done.”¹¹⁸ The Bush administration’s many attempts at gaining public support for the war illustrates the government’s belief in the importance of public opinion. With full awareness of the American public’s ‘Vietnam syndrome,’ “Bush and his advisers placed an overwhelming amount of military power in the Gulf to ensure a quick and decisive campaign that would not arouse the public outcry about the quagmire seen in the late 1960s and early 1970s.”¹¹⁹

One of the more popular narratives of U.S. military supremacy fed to the American public was the technical accuracy of the U.S.-led coalition’s military weapons—that the bombing campaign on Baghdad was precise and avoided civilian casualties. In the media, “videotapes of the precise bombing reinforced the image of a new era in high-tech warfare and the claims of a 100 percent Patriot intercept rate of [Iraqi] Scud missiles were used to extoll U.S. technological superiority.”¹²⁰ Reagan

¹¹⁷ Hallin and Gitlin, “The Gulf War as Popular Culture and Television Drama.” *Taken by Storm*, 137.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹⁹ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 158.

¹²⁰ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 186.

administration staffer Michael Deaver described the entire media extravaganza as “a combination of Lawrence of Arabia and Star Wars—i.e. heroic Western leadership of the Arab world joined with mouth-gaping demonstrations of advanced weaponry.”¹²¹ In reinforcing the U.S.-created image of new high-tech warfare and accuracy, the Bush administration “did what governments have done for thousands of years, although with greater subtlety. Rather than try to manipulate the interpretation of pictures already in the press, the administration flooded news media with vivid, kinetic videos of ‘smart’ bombs going down chimneys and cruise missiles precisely splitting bridges.”¹²²

General Schwarzkopf himself became one of the biggest distributors of propaganda to bolster the image of the U.S. military in the Middle East. The general “continually provided disinformation.... in his many official and unofficial meetings with the press,” releasing misleading numbers about the accuracy of allied bombing missions.¹²³ In several cases, Schwarzkopf boasted of an 80 percent ‘success rate’ of bombing targets and “on TV, it seemed that the American combat technology was unbeatable: [Americans] could put [their] bombs exactly where they were meant to go, and this implied a clean technowar closer to the kind played in video games than in real life.”¹²⁴ These accounts of technical excellence were augmented by broadcasted television commentary from ‘military insiders’—“every retired general found a new

¹²¹ Herbert Schiller. “Manipulating Hearts and Minds.” Mowlana, Gerbner, and Schiller, eds. *Triumph of the Image: The Media’s War in the Persian Gulf--A Global Perspective*. (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 23.

¹²² Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy*, 15.

¹²³ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 198.

¹²⁴ Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, 283.

career as a consultant to one or another of the national networks. When civilians appeared, they were the politically certified think-tank experts or DC politicians with impeccable establishment credentials.”¹²⁵ It was only after the war with the Pentagon’s admission that “70 percent of the bombs missed their targets” and visual evidence of the destruction of Iraq’s economic infrastructure, including civilian casualties and the destruction of nonmilitary targets, were the government’s and media’s claims put into dispute.¹²⁶ Further investigations by media outlets such as *Newsweek* reported that of 20,000 claimed bomber sorties flown, only approximately 11,000 if those were combat missions—the others were to transport munitions or vehicles or provide air cover or reconnaissance. Additionally, of the bomber planes whose purpose were to drop bombs, the success rate only indicated that the bombs had been dropped, not that a target had been hit.¹²⁷

After Saddam Hussein failed to comply with the January 15th deadline set forth in UNSC Resolution 678, Operation Desert Storm began on January 17th as Coalition forces mounted an extensive aerial bombing campaign on Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. The campaign aimed to destroy Iraq’s Air Force and anti-aircraft facilities, command and communication facilities, and weapons research facilities throughout the region.¹²⁸ The Coalition’s technological dominance in the strikes against Iraq included Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from warships in the Persian Gulf; Nighthawk stealth bombers

¹²⁵ Schiller, “Manipulating Hearts and Minds.” *Triumph of the Image*, 23.

¹²⁶ Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, 283.

¹²⁷ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 198-199.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

with a supply of laser-guided smart bombs; HARM anti-radar missiles; F-14, F-15, F-16 and F-A/18 fighter bombers; heat-seeking Maverick missiles launched from A-10 Thunderbolt jets; and AH-64 Apache and AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters firing laser guided Hellfire missiles and TOW missiles guided to targets by ground observers or scout helicopters.¹²⁹ Needless to say, Iraqi anti-aircraft defenses against the Coalition were no match for the Coalition's military predominance, and the U.S. government capitalized on this by "releasing powerful visuals which [co-opted] TV news agendas, such as the smart bomb videotapes and the images of Patriot missiles appearing to knock out incoming [Iraqi] SCUDS."¹³⁰ American cable news predominantly focused on this element of the war through countless stories and profiles of the U.S. military's technological advances. In the bombing campaign, "the U.S.-dominated multinational coalition systematically destroyed Iraq's military and economic infrastructure and inflicted terrible suffering on the Iraqi people. The Pentagon worked to project an image of a clean, precise, and efficient technowar, in which the U.S. military was controlling events and leading the coalition inexorably to victory."¹³¹ The result of the portrayal of the successful air campaign "paralleled the effect of the war on George Bush's approval ratings. No sooner did the news of Desert Storm hit CNN than Americans produced a major 'rally round the flag'" and approval of President Bush's actions in the First Gulf

¹²⁹ Edwin Moise. "Limited War: The Stereotypes." Clemson University. <http://edmoise.sites.clemson.edu/limit1.html>

¹³⁰ O'Heffernan. "A Mutual Exploitation Model of Influence in U.S. Foreign Policy." *Taken by Storm*, 241.

¹³¹ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 186.

War increased by nineteen points, according to Gallup polls.¹³² As American viewers saw “a steady stream of images from the Gulf, it seems that both success and danger reinforced determination.”¹³³

From the starting point of U.S. deployment in Saudi Arabia to Operation Desert Storm, the press faced unprecedented restrictions in the history of United States warfare. During the Vietnam War, journalists had been allowed access to combat troops and sites and “were consequently able to demonstrate the falsity of some of the information delivered at the ‘five o’clock follies’ (the press conferences)”.¹³⁴ Yet, in the Middle East, journalists were “ruled by restrictions on [their] freedom to visit front areas, troops, damaged buildings, and so on without military escorts.”¹³⁵ Furthermore, the press and video images captured in the Gulf were also subject to censorship by the military so that, “in effect, the military tightly controlled press coverage of the U.S. military deployment in the Gulf and then the action in the Gulf War.”¹³⁶ Defiance of the rules set forth by the Pentagon and General Schwarzkopf, who was present to witness the effects of media influence during his military service in Vietnam, was discouraged as any journalists who attempted to interview sources or report on their own were detained or told to leave upon arrival at the bases. In some cases, media credentials were revoked or journalists were threatened with deportation if they broke the rules of the pool system. As is what

¹³² Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 152.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Stig Nohrstedt. “Ruling by Pooling.” Mowlana, Gerbner, and Schiller, eds. *Triumph of the Image: The Media’s War in the Persian Gulf--A Global Perspective*. (Oxford: Westview Press, 2003), 119.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 80.

happened to *New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges who interviewed Saudi shopkeepers fifty miles from the Kuwaiti border, or threatened with deportation.¹³⁷ These restrictions diminished independent access to troops by inducing journalists to follow the rules or risk being excluded from indispensable media access, thus angering several media outlets.

This prompted CBS News president, Eric Ober, to write in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed:

As journalists, we need to seek out the story and relay it to the public. If we interview a soldier, we want to obtain frank, unpackaged responses that give people a better feel for the story at the front. But if Bob Simon, CBS News' veteran war correspondent, interviews the soldier with a military escort by his side, will the soldier really tell the truth? Will we really find out what is happening in the desert? I have to conclude that the answer is no.¹³⁸

However, the military set these restrictions because they believed the “coverage of the Vietnam War caused the home front to withdraw its support for U.S. forces and eventually made the president and Congress change their minds.”¹³⁹ Despite the contentious debate regarding the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ and whether the media influence of that era indeed ‘lost the war’ for the United States, the government took the concept seriously as evidenced in their actions regarding journalists’ independence in the Middle East.

Veteran conflict reporters and photojournalists became “concerned with the extent of military censorship, which was far greater than was necessary to prevent the leakage of sensitive military information. [They argued] censorship was used to eliminate

¹³⁷ Nohrstedt, “Ruling by Pooling.” *Triumph of the Image*, 120.

¹³⁸ Eric Ober. “A War is Waged for the Public’s Right to Know.” *Wall Street Journal*. Eastern edition [New York, N.Y.] 17 Jan 1991: PAGE A10.

¹³⁹ Nohrstedt, “Ruling by Pooling.” *Triumph of the Image*, 118.

information that might create a negative picture of the U.S. soldiers.”¹⁴⁰ In January of 1991 the Center for Constitutional Rights filed a federal lawsuit against the Pentagon in an effort to mitigate and overturn press restrictions, claiming that “military escorts engaged in arbitrary censorship of interviews, photography, and altered the activities of soldiers when reporters come into their presence, not for security reasons, but to ensure favorable coverage of their military presence.”¹⁴¹ The suit was filed on behalf of the *Nation*, the *Village Voice*, the *Progressive*, and other alternative and independent media and journalists. Furthermore, the suit alleged that the press pools that were organized by the military gave preferential to favored media outlets as shown by the *New York Times* being granted only one reporter in the press pools while the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* was given several reporters. However, “while the news organizations involved objected, they failed to join the litigation by magazines, because from a business standpoint the networks were obtaining large audiences that did not want negative reporting or stories contrary to the administration’s line.”¹⁴² The suit was eventually thrown out in April 1991, due to its abstract arguments and the war’s end at the end of February that year.¹⁴³ Despite the criticisms, U.S. military authorities continued to “set a limit on the number of journalists at the front, thereby securing control of news coverage

¹⁴⁰ Rune Ottosen. “Truth: the First Victim of the War?” Mowlana, Gerbner, and Schiller, eds. *Triumph of the Image: The Media’s War in the Persian Gulf--A Global Perspective*. (Oxford: Westview Press, 2003), 141.

¹⁴¹ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 82.

¹⁴² O’Heffernan, “A Mutual Exploitation Model of Media Influence in U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Taken by Storm*, 242.

¹⁴³ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 82.

through an effective censorship system.”¹⁴⁴ The military prioritized news outlets that were more likely to be sympathetic to their organization, sought to control any negative transmission of information going to the media from soldiers from the field or vice versa, and utilized security reviews of reports and videos produced by the press pools.¹⁴⁵

The government’s strategic use of images dispensed through television media marks the difference between this conflict and the Vietnam War, where conflict photography brought the horrors of warfare to the American public for the first time and contributed to undermining morale and support at home. The First Gulf War’s media coverage was equally flooded with images, but the suppression of negative optics and press created a skewed view to manipulate an increase in public support and attempt to erase the ‘Vietnam Syndrome.’ “The Pentagon, wanting to suppress memories of Vietnam and the human costs of war, forbade images of wounded Americans to appear and even made the U.S. reception center for dead soldiers at Dover, Delaware, off limits to the media.”¹⁴⁶ In one instance, “a *Nightline* episode on press control showed public affairs escorts breaking in and cutting off discussion between the press and soldiers on the front when topics were broached that the military did not want to see discussed.”¹⁴⁷ The televised coverage of the Gulf War illustrated “that television has the capacity to aestheticize war” by “emphasizing images that conveyed awe and beauty. In this way, TV journalists linked their occupational taste for visual narrative with the society’s deep

¹⁴⁴ Ottosen, “Truth: the First Victim of the War?” *Triumph of the Image*, 139.

¹⁴⁵ Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, 284.

¹⁴⁶ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 197.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

longing and appreciation for affirmative ritual.”¹⁴⁸ In particular, CNN’s “Crisis in the Gulf” coverage employed a constant flow of positive images of the U.S. troop deployment that was supportive of the military intervention, including the soldiers, military equipment, tanks, weapons, airplanes and countless interviews with the troops and military spokespeople.

Media coverage of human-interest stories exemplified the “media’s exploitation of issues that play well with large audiences—in this case, with issues the government wanted to play up. These included...stories mostly run by local television stations and newspapers, about homeboys on the battlefield; the ‘gee-whiz’ stories about super high-tech weapons...and the non-story, made up of press releases and fact-laden but contextually meaningless pronouncements” by the military.¹⁴⁹ In addition to these media reports, this conflict “was the first war ever played out on TV with the whole world watching it unfold, often live. Never before had so many people watched so much news,” thus leading to broadcast journalism’s motivation to maintain their audience with the positive coverage the public so desired.¹⁵⁰ The viewing audience was transfixed by the media machine’s “image of a modern technological war as it happened live from the ‘enemy side’” as the Gulf War coverage “provided vital information and great entertainment, and the line between the two often disappeared. As long as the information supported the government and drew audiences that could be sold to advertisers, both

¹⁴⁸ Hallin and Gitlin, “The Gulf War as Popular Culture and Television Drama.” *Taken by Storm*, 155-156.

¹⁴⁹ O’Heffernan, “A Mutual Exploitation Model of Media Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Taken by Storm*, 240.

¹⁵⁰ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 234.

parties benefitted.”¹⁵¹ For the duration of the conflict, the Bush administration and the military led by General Schwarzkopf “vilified Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis whenever possible while presenting their own actions, however brutal, in a positive light so that few negative images appeared of U.S. military actions.”¹⁵²

After nearly forty days of combat between the U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi forces and several failed diplomatic attempts at peace by the UNSC and Soviet Union, the United States military began to employ decoy air and naval attacks to mislead the Iraqi army into thinking the Coalition would focus their attacks on central Kuwait. Throughout this process, NBC, CBS, CNN, and ABC amongst others continually covered the progress and breakdown of peace negotiations as well as the run up to the ground war in Kuwait.¹⁵³ On February 24, 1991, U.S. and Coalition troops entered Kuwait from the southern border and made their way towards the capital, Kuwait City. Along the way, the allies encountered minefields, trenches, and positions poorly defended by Iraqi troops who they were able to overrun within a few hours of combat engagement. Despite a news blackout put into effect during the operation, General Schwarzkopf “broke the announced forty-eight hours news blackout” and painted a picture of Coalition forces going to great lengths to fight off Iraqi forces; however, it would soon appear that the allied troops were merely advancing with little opposition and despite a few tank battles were largely met

¹⁵¹ O’Heffernan, “A Mutual Exploitation Model of Media Influence in U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Taken by Storm*, 234.

¹⁵² Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 234.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 338.

with surrendering Iraqi soldiers.¹⁵⁴ As for the images portrayed by news media at this time, “a significant flow of video came in via pool footage, cleared by military censors sent up quickly to the satellites, and the networks were airing all footage of the theater of war immediately...Iraqi soldiers were depicted waiting throughout the desert with white flags, ready to surrender, and the allied forces were portrayed rushing through the desert meeting little or no resistance.”¹⁵⁵ American, British, and French forces continued to pursue the Iraqi troops into Iraq and within close range of Baghdad before suddenly withdrawing back to Iraq’s border with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, instead of capturing Baghdad and overthrowing Saddam Hussein’s government.¹⁵⁶ On February 28th, the First Gulf War was over.

In retrospect, the Gulf War has become a prime example of how media coverage “can be particularly effective in emotionally moving mass audiences through visual stories, and in functioning as political rhetoric to manipulate public sentiment and influence foreign policy.”¹⁵⁷ Unlike the Vietnam War, which lasted far longer than predicted and resulted in a high rate of American casualties, the combat phase, Operation Desert Storm, lasted a mere forty-five days and resulted in far fewer American casualties. Additionally, the U.S. government’s unrelenting smear campaign against Saddam Hussein and his aggressive actions in the Middle East paired with the large-scale pro-U.S. and Coalition military propaganda spread throughout the media created and

¹⁵⁴ Janet McDonnell. *After Desert Storm: The US. Army and the Reconstruction of Kuwait*. (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1999.), 67.

¹⁵⁵ Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 349.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁵⁷ Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, 281.

sustained the American public's support for the short duration of the conflict. The Pentagon-managed press pool "was the most successful military weapon used in the war. The pool was designed to permit a military monopoly on gathering, assembling, and disseminating information; this monopoly was accomplished through commission and omission."¹⁵⁸ Without much media coverage in the United States on the Middle East prior to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the Middle East was a "political and social enigma" for most Americans.¹⁵⁹ As a result, the continuous broadcast journalism coverage managed and censored by the U.S. government led people to believe that they were "seeing reality unfolding before them instead of understanding that they were really seeing only a version of events, primarily because no intermediary was immediately visible."¹⁶⁰ The image that the U.S. military disseminated and the media corroborated was both less accurate and less informative than the American public suspected. In this way, "the result was media coverage that fulfilled only military and propagandistic aims but that lacked any tangible evidence of human suffering: 'There was no body count as in Vietnam, and the image of a clinical, computerized war, which glorified the technological superiority of the alliance, penetrated all media.'"¹⁶¹

The U.S. military's tight control over information from the frontlines in the Middle East is a large part of why the First Gulf War is deemed a success by the

¹⁵⁸ Andre Gunder Frank. "A Third-World War: A Political Economy of the Persian Gulf War and the New World Order." Mowlana, Gerbner, and Schiller, eds. *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf--A Global Perspective*. (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1992), 15.

¹⁵⁹ Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, 281.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

American public. In a *Los Angeles Times* poll conducted after the liberation of Kuwait and withdrawal of U.S. troops, the survey of the American public observed that “two institutions enjoyed significant boosts from the war—the military and the television news organizations.”¹⁶² By utilizing press pools to limit the number of journalists present, requiring prior restraint for all information and photographs, providing military minders to all journalists, and threatening disobedient journalists or media with a loss of access to information, the U.S. military was able to manage the public image of the entire conflict. Yet, these restrictions were detrimental of the American public and the media establishment—“the will of the vast majority of people in the West was violated. Freedom of press was actively censored, and the free press, the guardian of democracy, censored itself. Participant democracy was bypassed and neutralized.”¹⁶³ However, in the end, it was the U.S. government’s implementation of military prowess to achieve a specific foreign policy goal combined with the media and propaganda portrayal of the Middle East conflict that led to a victory for the U.S. government and the military.

¹⁶² Schiller, “Manipulating Hearts and Minds.” *Triumph of the Image*, 29.

¹⁶³ Frank, “A Third-World War: A Political Economy of the Persian Gulf War and the New World Order.” *Triumph of the Image*, 13.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

In writing this thesis, I attempted to prove that media coverage of international conflicts has a direct influence on U.S. foreign policy via American public opinion gained through the types of media American citizens were exposed to. I started with the expectation that strong public opinion, either negative or positive, directly impacted the decisions that U.S. government and military leaders made in regards to military involvement in foreign conflicts. However, through my research, I found that the process is an indirect, multi-step process instead of a direct, single influence from the media to foreign policy changes. In choosing my case studies, I felt that the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War perfectly illustrated two instances of this phenomenon but with two polar opposite effects from the contradictory rules of media access set forth by the U.S. government in the 1960-70s and early 1990s respectively.

In the Vietnam War, I speculated that the strong public backlash from the media exposure of warfare through realistic photography and uncensored reporting led to the U.S.'s failure in Southeast Asia and prompted President Nixon to withdraw the troops. This in turn prompted the heavily censored media coverage in the First Gulf War and resulted in the American public largely supporting the successfully portrayed and short war effort in the Middle East. Furthermore, I aimed to demonstrate that the media coverage during the Vietnam War created irreversible ripple effects in the psyche of both the government and the American public in terms of future foreign policy; therefore

creating an isolationist attitude amongst the American government and the public regarding militarily intervening in foreign conflicts. However, I found that the combined effects of American media coverage and public opinion from the Vietnam War did not change what foreign policy decisions were made by U.S. government and military leaders. Instead, the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ changed how the United States went about achieving their military intervention aims and how such military endeavors were presented to the public. Therefore, the public opinion and pressure that occurred in part from the coverage in the Vietnam War enacted the change in the U.S. government’s attitude and policies regarding media access to journalists and the implementation of U.S. military actions in the First Gulf War. This illustrated how important public opinion was to enacting any military intervention involving U.S. troops abroad.

While the media’s portrayal of the Vietnam War was not the sole source of negative public opinion toward the government in the 1970s and therefore not the sole reason for Nixon’s policy of U.S. military withdrawal, public opinion influenced by the media became a substantial concern for U.S. military and government leaders after the Vietnam War ended. The declining public support for U.S. intervention in Vietnam “did not automatically reflect a turn toward isolationism...rather, it marked the beginning of a breakdown in...bipartisan consensus toward internationalism.”¹⁶⁴ As a result, the policy change did not occur in whether the United States would play an operative role in global affairs but what “type of role it should play: what combination of military action, diplomacy, and economic incentives should be used, and what should be the extent of

¹⁶⁴ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 35.

American commitments to foreign interests.”¹⁶⁵ The outcome of the lingering ‘Vietnam syndrome’ was the U.S. government’s awareness and approach to influencing public opinion in subsequent international endeavors. The United States became “leery of being held public hostage to the demands of its military excursions...As a result, the recent history of U.S. military involvement... has been characterized by quick interventions calculated to risk little: get-ins and get-outs, with the snatching of victory.”¹⁶⁶

By the time of the First Gulf War, “public opinion was a force that said not what to do but how to do it. As Bush and his advisers tried to shape public opinion through its foreign policy, public opinion actually shaped that foreign policy. Public opinion did not specifically determine the destination of the policy, but it had a lot to do with how the administration got there.”¹⁶⁷ Nearly two decades after the disastrous end of American intervention in the Vietnam War, the Bush administration adjusted their role in providing access to journalists and photojournalists in the Middle East with the full awareness of public opinion’s influence. In managing the factor that largely swayed public opinion in the Vietnam War, an unchaperoned media, the Bush administration took back the public narrative to portray a highly efficient, rapid, and bound-for-success military campaign in Kuwait. The military suppressed the photojournalists and reporters operating from the Middle East by requiring all media personnel to be accompanied by military minders when they interviewed somebody, establishing pre-approval of material before publication for security purposes, and releasing any positive and pertinent information

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶⁶ Moeller, *Shooting War*, 414.

¹⁶⁷ Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy After Vietnam*, 159.

solely through press pools in which all media outlets had to share the same information. The government furthermore threatened to cut off all media access or confiscate journalists' visas if a reporter defied the restrictions. Mirroring the rising public support for military action in the Middle East, the manipulated media presentation handed the Bush administration they needed to move forward.

Militarily, the Bush administration adjusted their tactics from the Vietnam era as well. With the power of public opinion looming, President Bush "viewed it as a force he could manipulate; if he gave the public assurances of maximum safety measures and reinforcement, [the public] would be more likely to support the war."¹⁶⁸ Therefore, to avoid high American casualty counts and a drawn-out conflict—two issues at the heart of the Vietnam era's negative public opinion—the Bush administration sent an overwhelming amount of military power to the Middle East which the Iraqi army was no match for. The tactic worked. The highly promoted ground campaign, whose military might was featured nonstop on cable news, lasted a mere 100 hours with minimal fighting as Saddam's Iraqi army quickly surrendered when encountered by Coalition forces. Kuwait was liberated and the U.S. military's clear cut goal was achieved. The quick succession of events during the First Gulf War paired with the extensive media manipulation by the United States government and military led the American public to believe that the short-lived international conflict was a rousing success.

The effect of the 'Vietnam syndrome' is evident in all of the government's aggressive actions in the Middle East. The U.S. government and military became attached to the idea of a 'quick and bloodless' intervention based on the memory of

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Vietnam. The decision to withdraw from the Middle East without ousting Saddam Hussein, arguing that he would be taken down by an internal Arab League coup, led to some criticism of U.S. forces. However, American leaders were adamant to ensure a quick intervention with an achievable target. Removing Saddam Hussein from power would open the U.S. led coalition forces to the possibility of transitioning Iraq to their next leader—a long-standing condition reminiscent of the quagmire in Vietnam which the U.S. government vowed not to repeat. By the end of the conflict, public opinion of President Bush's actions in the Middle East was high due to the new media and foreign policies adjustments set from the remnants of Vietnam's disastrously low public opinion. While the direct effect from media coverage to foreign policy change is tenuous, it is clear that public opinion and support, influenced by media coverage the American audience is exposed to, has a symbiotic relationship with the foreign policy decisions American leaders make.

Chapter VII

Definition of Terms

- Propaganda: manipulation or dissemination of information to the public in order to influence public opinion.
- Censorship: governmental restriction or other repression of individual journalists and non-government media. Press freedom is protected in the United States and some other nations, while few formal democracies and no authoritarian governments make provision for protection of press freedom.¹⁶⁹
- Press Pool: a practice enacted by the United States during the First Gulf War to control information released to the American public through limiting media outlets and journalists covering the conflict. Consisted of press briefings and military minders or escorts that promised access to the front lines in exchange for military protection as long as the journalist abided by the reporting guidelines (no independent reporting or investigations, publish only stories supporting the U.S. military effort, amongst others) and government pre-approval of released material under the pretense of operational security. Given their access to and reliance on soldiers while covering combat, pool journalists in many cases forged strong links to the troops they cover and, many argue, often write stories that are largely positive to the U.S. military.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ “Journalism Glossary,” University of North Carolina at Pembroke (2011): Web. 16 December 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, 223.

- Unilateral: journalists who have decided to cover international conflicts outside of the government-provided press pool. Unilaterals do not receive the benefits of press briefings, military protection, or access to the front lines and soldiers. As independent journalists, unilaterals exchange government approval and protection for uncensored access to the region and local civilians they are covering.¹⁷¹
- Framing: the media frame a person, an issue, or an event by selecting it for coverage; limiting or expanding the amount of coverage; suggesting its status and relative associations; and appointing spokespeople to present “sides” of the issue. They also supply a complex array of tones, nuances, contexts, and boundaries of controversy to the framed story.¹⁷²
- CNN Effect: a theory in political science and media studies that postulates that the development of the popular 24-hour international television news channel known as Cable News Network, or CNN, had a major impact on the conduct of states' foreign policy in the late Cold War period and that CNN and its subsequent industry competitors have had a similar impact in the post Cold War era. While the free press has, in its role as the "Fourth Estate," always had an influence on policy-making in representative democracies, proponents of the CNN effect argue that the extent, depth, and speed of the new global media have created a new species of effects qualitatively different from those that preceded them historically. The CNN Effect in the media may function alternately or simultaneously as:

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy*, 7.

- (1) a policy agenda-setting agent through emotional and compelling coverage of humanitarian crises or conflicts resulting in the reorganization of foreign policy priorities; most commonly exemplified in the cases of media coverage during the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and in Somalia during the Battle of Mogadishu in 1993
- (2) an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals that comes in two forms: 1) through the inhibiting consequences of emotional coverage that could undermine morale and public opinion, and 2) through the potential for global, real-time media coverage to jeopardize military operational security by releasing tactical information
- (3) an accelerant to policy decision-making by shortening the response time for foreign policy decision-making through constant media coverage¹⁷³
- Vietnam Syndrome: a concept used to claim that the widespread American opposition to the Vietnam War resulted in pacifist and isolationist sentiments that restricted the ability of American leaders to engage U.S. forces in future U.S. military operations overseas. Following the successful conclusion of the 1991 First Gulf War, which was won quickly and with few casualties by coalition forces, many U.S. foreign policy makers concluded that the Vietnam Syndrome had been defeated. Opposition to the Vietnam War took several forms. By 1968, concerns mounted that the war--justified or not--was unlikely to result in a U.S. victory, and polls for the first time showed that a majority of Americans from

¹⁷³ Livingston. "Clarifying the CNN Effect." The Joan Shorenstein Center: 4.

across the political spectrum were opposed to the conflict. Popular frustration mounted as U.S. involvement in combat operations would last for five more years. Subsequent polls revealed that while a majority of Americans still supported the use of military force if necessary to defend national security interests of the U.S., there was unprecedented skepticism regarding U.S. military operations in the developing world. In this instance, there were questions regarding the actual threat posed by the alleged enemy to U.S. national security, the ability of the United States to prevail in such a conflict, and/or the morality and legality of the intervention. Later foreign policy strategies for U.S. involvement reemphasized direct U.S. military intervention but with a number of caveats based on presumed lessons learned from Vietnam: commit U.S. troops only when U.S. or allied vital national interests are at stake and only when supported by the American public and Congress, establish in advance of troop commitment clear political and military objectives, commit troops wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning, use force appropriate to the threat but generally apply overwhelming force to shorten the length of the conflict and minimize American casualties, and use force only as a last resort.¹⁷⁴

- Annex Foxtrot: a ten-page policy memo dated January 14, 1991. Written by Captain Ron Wildermuth, the chief Public Affairs Officer for U.S. Central Command, it outlined heretofore unprecedented Pentagon restrictions on news

¹⁷⁴ Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, 1291-1292.

reporting of the Gulf War. The memo established press pools that gave the Pentagon control over who could talk to troops and under what conditions, as well as control over much of what could be reported. The restrictions also provided for prior restraint of material deemed dangerous to national security. Only selected journalists were allowed to visit the front lines or conduct interviews with the Army. Those visits were always conducted in the presence of officers, and were subject to both prior approval by the military and censorship afterward. This policy was heavily influenced by the military's experience with the Vietnam War, in which public opposition within the U.S. grew throughout the war's course.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Robertson, "Images of War." *American Journalism Review*.

Chapter VIII

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